

# Follow *the* Child

THE MSGH COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER



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## Dear Families,

A little more than six months into joining the MSGH community, I find myself full of gratitude for being a member of this incredibly special school. It has been such a comfortable transition and I am thankful for the privilege and opportunity to lead MSGH.

I have found MSGH special in that its community is especially warm and caring and there is a united focus on our children. All the decisions we make are through the lens of what is best for the children, which makes our decision-making process very clear. What makes us part of a greater community, is our dedication to Montessori education. The work we do, like so many other Montessori schools, is the work that will change the world. In fact it already has as Montessori children have grown up to make an impact on creating a more innovative and peaceful world. Sometimes it is challenging to understand just how our pedagogy and philosophy manifests into the unique characteristics that our children leave with.

What skills will our children need in order to prepare for the future AI workplace? While preparing for my interview with the MSGH search committee, I thought it would be interesting to research and share (if it turned out true) how the Montessori pedagogy aligned with the skills the children of today will need to be successful in the future. It wasn't surprising to find that the very skills needed are those that Montessori education has fostered since its creation in the early 1900's.

Artificial Intelligence mimics what humans program it to do, but does not have the ability to problem solve or create apart from its programming. In response to that, the current leaders in technology and education feel the future workforce will need the most human of skills such as Complex Problem Solving, Curiosity, Creativity, Collaboration, Critical thinking, Communication and Emotional Intelligence (the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and with empathy). Since information and tools to do calculations lie at our fingertips, it will be more important that people learn how to learn. In other words, to find information and to synthesize and make sense of their findings. They will also need to adopt the "life-long learner" approach to work. At the pace with which things are moving, it is probable that even if someone stays with the same company for an extended period of time, they will eventually be retrained for jobs that didn't exist when they started. Personal qualities such as flexibility and adaptability will be most helpful in these future situations. This is a time in history when asking someone, before college, what career they wish to embark on will be close to impossible for them to answer.

How does the Montessori pedagogy foster these skills? I found myself thinking back to the time in the early 90's when I was introduced to (and sold on) Montessori education. At the time, I had been teaching at a traditional boarding school for seven years when four boys joined my sixth-grade





"It comes for a moment but its  
benefits last for a lifetime."  
-Dr. Maria Montessori



classroom. Observing these boys, the product of ten years of a Montessori education and not knowing anything about Montessori, offered me a unique and clear perspective and one that I will use for this example.

The scenario I will describe was early in the year, just after the boys came to the school. I was teaching science at the time and on this particular day I assigned an outdoor experiment. Following my usual plan when assigning experiments, I gave them the instructions for the activity and sent them all outside to tackle it individually. I followed them out to observe and to make sure the class was actually performing the experiment and not getting distracted.

Almost immediately the boys caught my eye as I observed that rather than working individually, they gravitated toward each other. They began to work together to perform the experiment all the while collaborating by bouncing ideas around on how

to change it up to find alternate results. They communicated freely and comfortably with each other in an entirely intellectual way. Not only did they successfully complete the experiment, but they attempted some of their other hypotheses until time ran out. As expected, some of their attempts at altering the experiment failed. I recall that one of the boys got particularly frustrated when these challenges occurred, but I was amazed at how the others helped him through it by consoling him and getting him refocused on the task at hand. He persevered and jumped back into the problem-solving activity they had created out of the assignment. I was impressed by how they handled, in stride, the emotional energy of working together by communicating openly and respectfully. The change in emotions did not distract them from the larger goal (as it would have most 6th graders) and they addressed it in an exceptional way.

The “aha” moment that sold me on Montessori occurred after class, when the boys came up to me bubbling over with excitement and enthusiasm. They loved the experiment and had some ideas on how to extend it. There were books at home they wanted to check to see if their ideas made sense. They asked if they could work on it and then come in and present it to the class. Of course I was more than happy to support their request, one that I had not had before. The tasks were divided up and they went on their way. A few days later, they asked to present their findings to the class. They had orchestrated how to execute the presentation. They presented it and then demonstrated it to their classmates explaining and modeling exactly how it could be replicated. In hindsight, I realize they were giving the class a lesson.

Using backward thinking, I tried to envision what would have been in place at their Montessori school to create such unique learners. I could tell that trust had to have been established by the way they freely







and confidently communicated with me and with each other. Something had lit a fire in them about learning, making them curious and excited. Strong communication skills were modeled, as I observed them actively listening and sharing their ideas. They were taught how to collaborate and cooperate. Empathy was fostered. They learned to be resilient and not to let failure stop them. They were allowed, and possibly encouraged, to negotiate with their teacher. They were given the license to be creative and to brainstorm, extending their thinking. While problem solving, they were eager to further their learning by creating new examples to continue the challenge. Research was utilized as a tool to find answers to their hypotheses and they were taught how to share their work with others in the class and how to help them understand.

It's not surprising that this experience had me inquiring about Montessori and completely sold me on finding a school for my then two-year old son, as well as looking for a teaching position for myself. I found over the year that I became a better teacher having had these students in my class. Their enthusiasm was contagious and I wanted to support and feed that as much as I could.

It's incredible that one memory of a lesson in the early 90's could exhibit so many of the skills that will be needed far into the 21st century. The 90's were a time when the skills described were seen by few as valuable, yet this same scenario in a classroom today would be proudly used by admissions officers in their tours to prospective parents. The way society views education changes but the needs of the child remain consistent. This type of story is not unique to that time and place but is shared today, time and again, at MSGH as well as Montessori schools around the world and will continue to be told for years into the future.

As observed, Dr. Maria Montessori's thinking was years ahead of her time, but who could have guessed that her pedagogy would be relevant into the era of Artificial Intelligence? We are constantly reminded of Dr. Montessori's genius in creating a pedagogy that has already been relevant for over 100 years and looks to continue into our children's future.

Bev





## The Garden Party:

A beloved tradition, the Garden Party is an opportunity to gather as a community and celebrate the beginning of a new school year. After last year's event was cancelled, due to a thunderstorm, the Garden Party made a triumphant return to our community this past September. As our entrepreneurial adolescent students sold items from their student-run, micro-economy business, music and laughter echoed across the campus, while families and students reconnected after a summer apart. The photobooth was, as usual, a hit with parents and students. Thank you to all of our volunteers who made the evening such a success! We look forward to next year's gathering.







MSGH GARDEN PARTY  
9.14.2018





## A New Playground

The combined generosity of an anonymous donor, the Board of Trustees, and contributions from parents and friends, made Una Barry's longtime dream of a Natural Playground possible for all our children.

We are thrilled to share with you that on Monday, October 1, we proudly opened our Natural Playground to the students of MSGH!

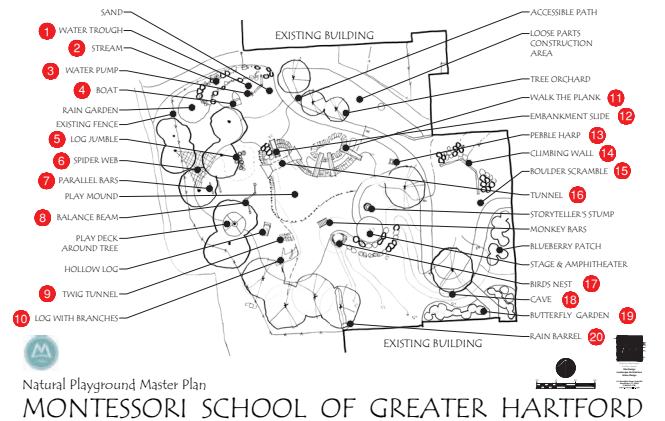
We are excited to provide your children and grandchildren with a richly engaging and unique outdoor experience. The Natural Playground offers our students the optimal outdoor environment for exploration and joyful discovery. It is such a tremendous, daily gift for our students and we were happy to make this dream come to life.



The Natural Playground Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, November 14, 2018



## The Natural Playground: Construction

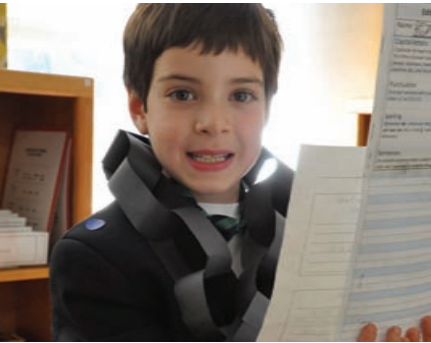








# Mystery History:









# Nature

By Sarah McCabe

It is impossible to study any of the subject areas, especially that of humanity, without also undertaking a study of nature and its boundless wonder. Within the Montessori curriculum, we guide the child toward an understanding of the world by incorporating nature and imagination. This understanding of the world is based on the child's interaction or experience with nature and his interpretation of this interaction.

As adults, how often do we seek out nature for understanding, to aid us in self-reflection, and to alleviate the everyday stressors of life? For the child, nature holds an even more profound vitality and purpose. It is the very means by which he makes sense of the world.

It is for this reason that nature abounds in the environment of Montessori's 6-12 year olds. Elementary children deeply immerse themselves in exploring the natural harmony and interdependencies of all things in creation, especially humans' impact on all of it.

The optimal preparation of the indoor environment will include a myriad of plants and flowers decorating the space, so as to create a homey feeling without overwhelming the child. Within the walls of the classroom you may find ivies, philodendron, African violets, cane plants,



orchids, cacti, freshly picked hydrangea (which also look lovely once they've dried out), and the beloved rose that lends itself seamlessly to the study of flower parts.

Amidst the live specimens, students are pursuing botanical studies through science experiments involving plant physiology, and through dissections of flowers, fruits, and even seeds. Together, we







compare and contrast the varieties of these, along with roots, and see how they may serve a purpose for human nutrition. We spend time cooking scrumptious, simple, whole-food recipes... Or perhaps they don't turn out as delicious as the children had hoped, but they are invited to reflect on what could be changed or added to make the recipe better - and then we try again. We take an imagined trip through time in the stories that we tell, exploring the evolution of medicinal herbs and homeopathic remedies used throughout time.

Ideally, an outdoor garden will serve as an extension of the indoor environment. The children primarily care for this space, with guidance from the adult. It provides ample opportunity for movement, for children to obtain hands-on

experience caring for and tending to a living ecosystem. They may plant bulbs in the autumn, and bear witness to their beauty come spring. They may maintain an active compost pile as they undergo a study of beneficial bacteria and fungi. This is all done parallel to developing consciousness around reducing, reusing and recycling.

Animal life is also abundant in their environment. Earlier this year, I paid a visit to the Lower Elementary garden with an Upper Elementary student. We watched joyfully as a group of Lower Elementary students nearly exploded with excitement and curiosity as Steve, their guide, encouraged their freedom to observe and carefully hold two European grass frogs that had emerged unexpectedly. This ignited an interest in the Kingdom Animalia material. You could take this a step further in Upper Elementary, taking time to compare and contrast the difference between the eukaryotic cells of the frog versus the prokaryotic cells of the bacteria in the compost.







You may have heard the term “going-out,” especially if you’ve been part of the Montessori community for some time. These are opportunities, again prepared by the children with guidance from the adult, for the children to go out into the larger society to explore and to expand their studies. They are important in further exposing the children to nature’s wonders. For instance, a child may visit the Adolescent Program at Millstream Farm, perhaps to learn more about how to care for goats. On this trip with a few friends, he may also observe other aspects of the environment and become struck by the fact that every cell within a honeybee comb is hexagonal. He might then return to the classroom to answer, “Why a hexagon?” That may lead to a story about Marcus Terentius Varro, a Roman soldier, scholar and writer who lived over 2,000 years ago. How awesome would it be to learn that somebody from 36 B.C. theorized that the regular hexagon was, mathematically, the most efficient and compact shape for the purpose of honey production. And then, to find out that a 1999 mathematical proof actually demonstrated and supported his thousands-year-old theory!

I could go on and on when it comes to this topic, but Maria Montessori explained it best when she imparted this bit of wisdom,

*“The child cannot develop if he does not have objects around him permitting him to act. Until the present, it was believed that the most effective learning took place when knowledge was passed on directly to the child by his teachers. But it is really the environment that is the best teacher. The child needs objects to act; they are like nourishment for his spirit.” - Maria Montessori*

Let us turn to nature for these “objects” of which Dr. Maria Montessori speaks, and let it do the teaching, while we simply provide the connection through which the learning can occur.







# WINTER SING-ALONG









# Development News

It is with great enthusiasm that I take on the role as Director of Development and Community Relations. I am a passionate Montessorian, believing whole heartedly in the unfathomable potential that lies within each child. As educators (teachers, adults, parents, lifelong learners ourselves), our role is to assist the child in their quest for understanding, adaptation, and self-discovery. A skillful educator is able to accomplish this only through deep respect for the learning and development of each child.



I still vividly recall my first day at MSGH, over 15 years ago. I was observing one of the primary classrooms as part of the staff orientation process. There was a peaceful hum in the room as the work cycle was already in full swing. The environment, just as it is today, was calm and welcoming: full of beauty and wonder.

The classroom door opens, in enters a very small and very somber little boy. I would later learn that this morning was not a typical one for this 3-year-old; his mother, in rushing to catch a morning flight, had forgotten their daily goodbye ritual, specifically 2 kisses and 1 long hug. The little boy was left teary-eyed, staring back at the closed door. Barely a moment passed before someone came to his aid. An older boy, easily 2-years his senior, hastily walked past me (he was clearly on a mission), tissue in hand. Without saying a word he handed the tissue to the small child and wrapped both arms around him. Across the room, I could feel their embrace and the compassion. He then helped the little one with his coat, kneeling down to unlatch the zipper, and even found where in the lineup of cubbies it belonged. Soon after they parted ways to choose their own interests in the room, as if nothing had occurred. Something very much had occurred, and I was left utterly bewildered. 'What did I just witness? How does this happen, how can I be a part of it?' Just like that, I was hooked. It was in that moment I knew there was something very special taking place in these classrooms, at this school.

I have had the privilege of working with all levels of programming at MSGH, experiencing the big work of a Montessori education. I constantly find myself in awe of the personal achievement each child reaches when we truly 'follow the child' and the level of compassion and empathy in all of our community environments: for each other, the environment, and the greater community. Montessori education fosters confident, compassionate participation in the world by nurturing each individual's passions and quest for independence. My new role is very much about connecting people to what we do and allowing them to be part of it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Toko Odorcuk".

Toko Odorcuk, Director of Development and Community Relations

# Family Association News



Thank you, Catie Curran for hosting our Toddler/Primary Tea!

A decorative graphic with a green geometric pattern border. Inside the border, the text reads: "Upcoming Tea with Bev", "Wednesday, March 27th", "For Elementary/Primary", and "8:30-10:00a.m.".

**Upcoming Tea with Bev**  
Wednesday, March 27th  
For Elementary/Primary  
8:30-10:00a.m.







## Determining When to Give A Lesson by Kathy Aldridge

As Guides, we are often asked by parents, “How do you decide when to give my child a ‘new’ lesson?” This decision is based on careful observation while the child works with current material, the indirect preparation for skills that will be needed for the next lesson, knowledge of the child’s developmental needs, and an awareness of the learning process. As you can see it’s a very different model from one that checks the box and moves on to the next lesson.



In our classrooms, new lessons are linked to former ones by drawing upon previously learned knowledge. The more solid the foundation, the deeper the understanding of any additional information presented.

If the child lacks the necessary skills when presented with a new lesson, he will be frustrated but, if properly prepared, he stands a good chance for success and will get the most from what the material has to offer. The art in helping a child learn a concept is knowing what skills and knowledge will be needed long before the lesson is given. The entire activity of presenting a lesson is one of analysis. We always observe the current skill level, link it to a past experience, and keep in mind his future needs.



Since learning causes a change in the child which is often not seen, the Guide’s task is to create conditions in which learning is optimal. First, and foremost, the child needs to be interested in the work. Some type of internal connection should occur between the child and what is being presented. This interest can originate from within the child or it might be initiated by the Guide. When the latter occurs, Montessori refers to the Guide as the “dynamic link between the child and the material.” In these instances, the Guide calls upon her knowledge of the child and whatever dramatic means she has available, to entice the child into wanting to work with the material. Once this connection is made, the guide needs to allow the child as much time as needed to explore this new concept, knowing that the more repetition he

experiences, the more likely this information will be retained in his consciousness. Therefore, it is important for the Guide to be able to move the child from the connection stage to the exploration stage and then provide opportunities for the child to transfer the knowledge gained to other areas.

The learning process is often more complex than it appears and may require the child to call on many different skills. For example, before the Constructive Triangle boxes can be understood, the child has been observed successfully working with the color tablets and the geometry cabinet. By exploring these boxes, the child discovers how different four-sided plane figures can be constructed from triangles. These sensorial impressions will later be called upon when, in Elementary, he is discovering rules for finding area and equivalences. The materials move the



child from concrete manipulation of a concept to an abstract thought.

There comes a moment when the guide knows that the child's thinking about the material has been modified - it's become more acute or defined. The child might now want to give this lesson to another child or the Guide observes his ability to transfer the information gained. For example, the child who has explored the geometry cabinet now identifies some work tables as square, others rectangular and still others, trapezoid.



Learning should not be an effort to children. It should result from a personal interest and involvement with the world. Jerome Bruner, in *The Process of Education* stated, "The best way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing, which means to make the knowledge gained useable in one's thinking beyond the situation in which the learning has occurred." Children who memorize without any intuitive knowledge can reproduce numerical formulas but have no ability to use them in a meaningful way. It is intuitive understanding that leads to creative application. The beauty of Montessori materials is that they give the child a continuum of intuitive understanding by transferring a general idea or principle from one group of material to the next. This experience allows the child to recognize that information learned in one setting has practical applications elsewhere and just as important, he is given the freedom and opportunity to make these connections by himself. In a Montessori classroom, the "learning" takes place after the lesson is given. That is why the Guide cannot present the next lesson until the child has had the time needed to fully explore the material and acquire that deeper understanding of the concept.

Save the Date

Annual Auction is May 4, 2019





# Our 2018/2019 Children's Fund



Families find their way to MSGH in a variety of ways: they may have been referred by a friend, attended an Open House, or desired a Montessori education for their child. Regardless of how they found their way here, virtually all of our families cite an instant connection to the MSGH guides and our community. Families feel comfortable entrusting their children to MSGH, because they know their children will be given an incredible experience, both academically and developmentally. And an important part of the relationship between MSGH and its families is our support of each other. MSGH supports all of our students and their families, and in turn, MSGH relies on its families to be active and involved in our school community. This is shown through participation in our Parent Information

Series, conferences with guides, attendance at school events, and by supporting our development efforts. Participating in the Children's Fund is an extremely meaningful way to demonstrate your support of our school.



Every donation to the Children's Fund, regardless of the amount, makes a big difference. **What matters most is that everyone participates in supporting this annual fund.**

We hope you will make a meaningful contribution to the Children's Fund, at whatever level is comfortable for you. **A donation of any amount makes a big difference in our ability to provide the nurturing and unique Montessori experience you have chosen for your family. Whatever the amount, the most important thing to remember is that we all need to participate!**

*Thank you to everyone who has supported MSGH.*







# Montessori School of Greater Hartford 2018-2019 Children's Fund

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For questions, please contact Toko Odoreczuk, Director of Development at 860.236.4565 ext. 101.



# Thank you for supporting the Montessori School of Greater Hartford!

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## Montessori School of Greater Hartford

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*Our Mission: Montessori School of Greater Hartford fosters a strong foundation for confident, compassionate participation in the world by nurturing each child's unique gifts, passion for learning, and independence. As a community, we enrich families, live our diversity, and embody the Association Montessori Internationale standards of excellence.*

### FOLLOW THE CHILD

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